

Contributions

THE REFLEX INFLUENCE OF MISSIONS

Read at National Conference by C. F. Yoder.

It is a law of physics that to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. I throw a ball against a building and part of the energy expended in throwing it will bring the ball back to me and part of it is turned to heat which warms the building, the ball and the air.

The same law holds in the spiritual world. A blow is struck for righteousness and the energy expended reacts in an increase of righteousness and in raising a little higher the moral temperature both of the world in general and the person who strikes the blow.

The same phenomena is true in practical church work. An effort is made to evangelize the world. The energy expended will result in some visible results in the way of converts and mission establishments, but a part of the effort will, as in the case of the ball, seemingly be lost in beating the air. But it is not lost. This part of the reaction raises the moral standard of the heathen world in ways which cannot be told by figures, and again quickens to a higher life the moral impulse of the church and persons making the effort. I am to pass by today the bright fruit of missions as seen in the reclaimed lives of ten thousands of thousands of heathen. I should like to hold up this point for your inspiration but time forbids. I must not pause either to point out to you the thousand other ways in which missionary effort is helping the kingdom on, by influencing the lives and teaching of those who do not openly profess Christianity. They tell us that Buddhist and Hindoo and Mohamedan teachers are taking the key-notes of Christianity and and sounding them as a part of their own doctrines. "So in every way Christ is preached and herein will we rejoice", but I cannot dwell on that. They tell us that missionaries make many scientific discoveries, that they open the way for commerce and civilization, that they influence high officials in heathen courts, that they create in the heathen a thirst for western knowledge, that they give to them an impression of the high plane of western character. Much of this is counteracted by the greed and villainy of the trader and politician who go to make spoil of the heathen with rum and gunpowder and sometimes too in the name of the missionaries. But the work moves on, and the leaven multiplies, and the kingdom comes.

I must leave this tempting field and speak to you to-day merely of the reflex influence of missions upon the church engaged in the work.

Our own experience in foreign work furnishes little data for such observations but the story of the missions of the church in general for two thousand years is not without its lessons. Thank God for those lessons, for in their light we can go forward with confidence and great hope.

Today we are considering the advisability of launching out upon some definite foreign missionary enterprise and we want the light of past experience thrown upon the problems that we make no mistaken moves. The early church moved forward without such light. They had the simple command of the Master to go and make disciples of all nations. After that command their love for him would not permit them to falter. Love drove them forth and faith sustained them. We have today the same command and greater cause for love and faith and yet we falter and seek for light. Well then what light does the past give us for our guidance? You remember the attitude of the past century when a member of the mass legislature opposed missions because as he said "we have no religion to export," and you know the changed attitude of the present century when it has become as apparent as the noon-day sun that the church or nation which has no religion to export will soon have none to keep. What has brought about the change of sentiment? The experience of the church with the fruits of missions. The message of such churches as the Baptist which a few years ago divided upon this very question, the Free-will Baptist favoring and the "Hard-shell" Baptists opposing foreign missions. At the time there were about 8000 in each party. What of the history of each? The favoring missions has grown until it is the strongest united Protestant body in the world while the party opposing missions has actually decreased in numbers. Is there a reflex action to missions? Let the voice of such facts as these be heard for they are in a true sense the voice of the Spirit calling on to larger faith and larger love and larger endeavor.

Let me speak more specifically. Let me separate if possible the voices which blend so harmoniously into one great clarion call to missions. What are the various reflex influence of missions?

1. There is first, the reflex influence of increasing knowledge.

If we would help the man who fell among thieves we must first of all know that a man has fallen among thieves. If we would help the unevangelized world we must first know the need and the duty and the power of constraining love. Now Professor Graham Taylor of the Chicago Commons social settlement says, and says truly, that the Bible cannot be rightly understood unless it is obeyed. It is a book for the life and not for the intellect. The church which is a mere society club on the fashionable avenue cannot possibly know the depths of meaning in the Savior's precepts about "the greatest among you being the servant of all" or "seeking first the kingdom of God" or caring for his poor, calling not the righteous but sinners to repentance. Neither can a church with no eye open toward the foreign field have any deep emotion over the whitened harvest there or any clear understanding of the duty of laboring there. "My people perish for lack of

knowledge" cried the Old Testament prophet and the cry is echoing still. I deny that that indifference of the fortunate half of the world to the needs of the other half is due to selfishness alone. The one half does not know how the other half lives.

Who have responded to starving India's cry? Those whose hearts have been reached by the cry thru knowledge of the awful conditions. Why did our country rise to end the atrocities of Spain in Cuba? Because our knowledge of the suffering there would not any longer permit us to keep silence.

When shall the church rise in her might to complete the evangelization of the world? Where a knowledge of the need and the duty is so flashed upon the people, and dinged in their ears and forced down their throats and kept hot until the heart feels and the hand moves and the church speaks. These conferences, the church paper, the pulpits and the societies with individual workers are the channels thru which the work must be done, but back of these it is the missions actually at work which give flesh and blood and volume to the voice of the world's need and send it cheering to our shores to rouse the slumbering church.

God grant that if we have been slow we shall yet not be wilfully ignorant, but that soon we shall be able to read thru the EVANGELIST letters from foreign lands which shall rouse the church from center to circumference to this work which Dr. Pierson calls "The greatest work of the world."

2. This suggests the reflex influence which comes to a church thru her missionary heroes. The progress of the world has not come so much thru the masses lifting themselves as thru great leaders rising above the masses and showing them how to rise to the same plane. Abraham, Joseph, Moses and David stood for the most advanced ideals of their own generations, each rising higher than the last. Jesus for all generations stands out as the incarnation of human perfection and toward Him we strive as the athlete strives toward his shining goal.

Even so our missionary heroes discover to us new planes of consecration and of faith. When we read of the patience and determination and sacrifice of Carey, who braved the ridicule of the world to go to India, or of the loving labors of Livingstone whose body lies buried in Africa but whose heart beats warm blood thru-out the world, or of the deliverances of John G. Paton in his long ministry among the cannibals of New Zealand, or of the guidance of Hudson Taylor in China and of Judson in India, when we read of Moffat and Gordon and Morrison and Xavier and the hosts of others who thru faith have opened the doors of empires, stopped the mouths of error, scattered the darkness of superstition, and by yielding up their all to the Master have written his character on the hearts of the nations. They have been lifted up and they draw men unto them. How long before the Brethren church shall feel the reaction thrill of her own heroes